

**San José State University**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**POLS 15-8: Essentials of U.S. and California Government**  
**Fall 2019**

Instructor: Martín Ordóñez  
Office: Clark Hall 406G  
Email: martin.ordonez@sjsu.edu (preferred)  
Phone number: 408-924-8334  
Office Hours: Tu Th, 13:30-14:30 (and by appointment)  
Class days & time: Tu Th, 12:00-13:15  
Classroom: DMH149A  
GE/SJSU Studies Category: US2, US3, D3

**Course Format**

This course will be taught combining the traditional lecture-based format with active discussion and debate. Students are expected to have completed the assigned reading in advance of the week's classes.

**Course Description**

From the SJSU Catalog: Treatment of essentials of U.S. and California government. Satisfies the American Institutions requirements in U.S. Constitution (US2) and California Government (US3), and the Core GE requirement in Social Sciences: Social Issues (D3). GE Area: D3, and American Institution Requirement: US2 and US3.

***Course and GE Learning Outcomes (GELO)***

Upon successful completion of this GE course, students will be able to:

1. **GELO 1 (US2):** Explain how political decisions are made, their consequences for individuals and society, and how individuals and groups may affect the decision-making process. Analyze the meaning and content of the democratic process as it has evolved in the United States and California and describe the foundations of the political system and the evolving institutions of government, the links between the people and government, and the operations of California government. **Assessed by two exams and quizzes 1 to 10.**
2. **GELO 2 (US3):** Identify the tools of political action and collective decision making at the local, state, national, and global level and articulate the values and assumptions that inform their civic engagement. **Assessed by two exams and quizzes 1 to 10.**
3. **GELO 3 (D3):** Place contemporary developments in cultural, historical, environmental, and spatial contexts. **Assessed by paper assignment.**
4. **GELO 4 (D3):** Identify the dynamics of ethnic, cultural, gender/sexual, age-based, class, regional, national, transnational, and global identities and the similarities, differences, linkages, and interactions between them. **Assessed by final exam, quizzes 5 to 7.**
5. **GELO 5 (D3):** Evaluate social science information, draw on different points of view, and formulate applications appropriate to contemporary social issues. **Assessed by paper assignment.**

6. **GELO 6 (D3):** Apply multidisciplinary material to a topic relevant to policy and social action at the local, national, and/or international levels. **Assessed by paper assignment.**

### Required Readings

*American Government and Politics Today* by Barbara Bardes, Mack Shelley II, and Steffen Schmidt. 2018-2019 edition. ISBN-13: 978-1337091213.

*California Politics and Government: A Practical Approach* by Larry Gerston and Terry Christensen. 14th edition, 2016. ISBN-13: 978-1285874524.

Further readings are listed in the Schedule of the Course and available on CANVAS. Other readings will be assigned throughout the course and will be available on CANVAS.

### Course Requirements

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

### Course Assignments

*Quizzes (15%):* Throughout the course, we will have 10 in-class pop quizzes based on the reading assignments. A question answered correctly receives two points; a question answered incorrectly receives one point; a question not answered at all receives no points. Each student's top 8 scoring quizzes will be counted. The questions are intended to encourage students to keep current with the reading, which is critical to success in the course.

*Midterm Exam (25%):* The midterm exam will test students on the material covered in the first half of the course. The exam will consist of multiple-choice and short essay questions.

*Final Exam (30%):* The final exam will test students on the material covered during the whole course, although greater emphasis will be placed on the material covered during the second half. The exam will consist of multiple-choice and short essay questions. **The Final Exam will take place on Tuesday, December 17, from 09:45-12:00 in this same classroom.** You need a T&E 200 scantron (the large sheet with the blue round bubbles), a #2 pencil, a large green book, and a pen for the final exam.

*Paper (30%):* Students are required to write a 1200-words (about 5 pages double-spaced) paper addressing a central topic of the course. For the paper, students are expected to use the material of the course and other academic sources to analyze a specific topic.

### Late Work and Make-Up Policies:

- Quizzes cannot be made up or turned in late. As noted above, each student's top 8 scoring responses will be counted.
- Students with a compelling reason requiring their absence from class on the date of the midterm or final exam must discuss this with me in advance and have the absence pre-approved - in which case we will agree on an alternate test date. Reasons that would merit a pre-approved absence are: a serious medical condition, religious holiday, pre-approved university-sanctioned event or activity, military orders, or family emergency. The only excuse for missing an exam without pre-approval is a documented medical emergency. With only these exceptions, a missed exam cannot be made up and will result in zero points.
- All late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a grade for each day following the due date. If you face a serious illness that renders you unable to complete the paper on time, you must notify

me in person or by email before the assignment is due. Exceptions to this are only allowed in cases of documented medical emergency.

Assignments will be graded as follows:

A plus	97 to 100%
A	92 to 96%
A minus	90 to 91%
B plus	87 to 90%
B	82 to 86%
B minus	80 to 81%
C plus	77 to 80%
C	72 to 76%
C minus	70 to 71%
D plus	67 to 70%
D	62 to 66%
D minus	60 to 61%

### **Final Examination or Evaluation**

As described in the section above, the in-class final exam will cover the material learned during the whole course, although greater emphasis will be placed on the material covered during the second half. The exam will consist of multiple-choice and short essay questions. **The Final Exam is on Tuesday, December 17, from 09:45-12:00 and will be held in DMH149A.** You need a T&E 200 scantron (the large sheet with the blue round bubbles), a #2 pencil, a large green book, and a pen for the final exam.

### **Guidelines for the Paper**

The Constitution of the United States created a strong but *limited* national government. These limits of the national government are expressed in the division of its powers, the adoption of a federal system and the proclamation of civil liberties and rights. However, it is possible to find several instances where the government's decisions (adopted or attempted) are in tension with these limits. These instances may include, for example, cases of executive overreach, judicial activism (or restraint), one branch's failure to oversee another or to perform their mandated duties, or national government meddling into states spheres of authority, among others.

For your paper, you will be asked to select one of these cases and analyze it, addressing in your analysis its significance for the limits of the national government. Specifically, your paper should 1) describe the case, 2) analyze it using the materials of the class and other relevant academic sources, and 3) based on the analysis, argue for or against the adoption of decisions studied in the case.

This assignment has three parts:

1. *Topic Selection and Approval (due September 19)*: Submit a brief explanation of the topic of your paper and how you are planning to address it. I will reply to let you know whether your topic is approved or not. Throughout the course, we will discuss some possible case. Feel free to use them in your paper. However, the use of original cases will be rewarded in the paper's grade.
2. *Outline and List of Sources (due October 22)*: Submit a brief outline of the argument of your paper and a list of the bibliographic sources you plan to use for the paper. These sources must be not less than 10, at least one of them must be a reading of the course, and at least 5 must be academic sources (e.g. peer-reviewed articles, law review articles, etc.). You should use proper bibliographic form, but I do not care whether you use MLA, APA, or another style. I will reply giving you comments and suggestions.
3. *The Paper (due December 5)*: Submit a final version of the paper. This paper should be 1200 words long (about 5 pages double-spaced) and include a minimum of 8 high-quality sources.

Note that only part 3 will be directly graded. Parts 1 and 2 are optional instances, where you will receive feedback on the progress of your paper. However, your participation in parts 1 and 2 will be rewarded in the paper's grade. You must submit all these documents through Canvas, by 11:00 am of the corresponding day. Only PDFs and Word docs of the paper will be accepted

### Use of technology in class

Your focus and active engagement during class is critical to the success of the course. This class has a No Digital Media policy. Please keep your laptops, cells, tablets, etc. in your bag at all times, please silence your phones before coming to class, and please do not text in class. Exceptions can be made for people who use laptops *exclusively* to take notes.

### University Policies

SJSU has policies on many important topics that apply to all courses. These topics include grading, attendance, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, and more. Information about these policies is available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>. If you have questions about any of this material, please ask.

## Pols 15 Essentials of U.S. and California Government, Fall 2019 Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change with reasonable notice provided through Canvas and/or classroom announcement.

---

<b>Unit 1: Basis of Government in the U.S.</b>	
<b>22 Aug</b>	<b>Introduction to the Course</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Syllabus</li></ul>
<b>27 Aug</b>	<b>State/Government and Democracy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- AGPT* Ch.1</li></ul>
<b>29 Aug-3 Sep</b>	<b>The U.S. Constitution</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- AGPT Ch.2</li><li>- Federalist 10 &amp; 51 (see AGPT or online)</li></ul>

---

<b>Unit 2: Horizontal Division of Power</b>	
<b>5-10 Sep</b>	<b>The U.S. Congress</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- AGPT Ch.9</li><li>- Rick Hall, "Conservatives, now is the time to defend against executive overreach", The Hill, June 15, 2018</li><li>- Fred Barnes, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being A Congressman", The New Republic, 15 February 1988</li><li>- George Packer, "The Empty Chamber: Just how broken is the Senate?" The New Yorker, August 9, 2010.</li><li>- <b>Optional:</b> Zachary Roth, "Investi-gate", Washington Monthly, June 2006</li></ul>
<b>12 Sep</b>	<b>The U.S. Executive I: President</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- AGPT Ch.10</li><li>- Bryce, J., 1888. Why Great Men Are Not Chosen Presidents. The American Commonwealth (London: MacMillan &amp; Co., 1888). Harold Laski, The American Presidency (NY: Harper, 1940).</li></ul>

- 17-19 Sep      **The U.S. Executive II: Bureaucracy** (*Paper topic selection due Sep 19*)
- AGPT Ch. 11
  - David A. Fahrenthold, "How the VA Developed Its Culture of Coverups", The Washington Post, May 30, 2014
  - Elizabeth Drew, "Power Grab," The New Yorker, Volume 53, Number 11. June 22, 2006
  - **Optional:** Cathleen Decker, "Obama's Response Is All Too Familiar", Los Angeles Times, May 26, 2014.
  - **Optional:** Richard Simon, "Some Lawmakers Want Criminal Inquiry of VA", Los Angeles Times, May 26, 2014.

- 24-26 Sep      **The U.S. Judiciary**
- AGPT Ch.12
  - Erwin Chemerinsky, "The Supreme Court Gun Fight", Los Angeles Times, June 27,2008
  - Richard Wolf, "Chief Justice John Roberts' Supreme Court At 10, Defying Labels," USA Today, 29 September 2015

---

**Unit 3: Vertical Division of Power**

---

- 1-3 Oct      **Federalism**
- AGPT Ch.3
  - Allie Bidwell, "The politics of Common Core" U.S. News, March 6, 2014
  - Stephanie Banchemo, "School-Standards Pushback", Wall Street Journal, August 27, 2014.

- 8 Oct          **Midterm Review**  
 10 Oct        **Midterm Exam**

---

**Unit 4: The Government and the People**

---

- 15-17 Oct     **Civil Liberties & Civil Rights**
- AGPT Chs.4-5
  - "Spy on me, I'd rather be safe" Intelligence Debates, November 20, 2013. <https://www.intelligencesquaredus.org/debates/spy-me-id-rather-be-safe>
  - **Optional:** Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. 2005. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." The Journal of American History 91(4), pages 1233-1263

- 22 Oct        **Public Opinion and the Media** (*Paper Outline and List of Sources due Oct 22*)
- AGPT Ch.6
  - Eugene Kiely and Lori Robertson, "How to Spot Fake News". Factcheck.org, November 18, 2016.

- 24 Oct        **Interest Groups: Democ’y’s Informal Organizations**
- AGPT pp. 146-156
  - Emily Ellsworth, "How to Effectively Lobby Your Congressperson", Jezebel, November 15, 2016.
  - **Optional:** Robert Putnam. 2001. "Tuning in, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America" (Chapter 3) in Controversies in Voting Behavior. Washington DC: CQ Press

- 29 Oct Political Parties: Democry's Formal Organizations**
- AGPT pp. 157-171. Review pp. 13-17
  - "What's Going On With All Those House GOP Retirements?", FiveThirtyEight, August 2, 2019.
  - **Optional:** Andrew Gelman. 2010. "Polarized Parties" (Chapter 8) in Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 31 Oct U.S. Voting, Campaign & Elections**
- AGPT Ch.8
  - Carrie Levine and Chris Zubak-Skees, "1 In 5 Democratic Donors Are Giving To More Than One Presidential Candidate", FiveThirtyEight, August 2, 2019.

---

**Unit 5: Policy Making**

---

- 5 Nov Domestic policy**
- AGPT Ch.13
  - Tom Cohen, "Rough Obamacare rollout: 4 reasons why" CNN.com, October, 2013
  - **Optional:** Michael D. Shear, "Sebelius Resigns after Troubles over Health Site", New York Times, April 10, 2014
- 7 Nov Foreign policy**
- AGPT Ch.14
  - President Obama's speech on U.S. drone and counterterror policy May 23, 2013

---

**Unit 6: Government and Politics in California**

---

- 12 Nov The California Legislature**
- CPG\*\* Ch.5
  - Other readings TBA
- 14 Nov The California Executive Branch**
- CPG Ch.7
  - Other readings TBA
- 19 Nov The California Courts**
- CPG Ch.6
  - Other readings TBA
- 21 Nov California Local Government**
- CPG Ch.9
  - Other readings TBA
- 26 Nov State-Federal Relations**
- CPG Ch.10
  - Other readings TBA
- 3 Dec California Voting, Campaign & Elections**
- CPG Ch.3
  - Other readings TBA

**5 Dec**            **Final Exam Review** (*Paper due Dec 5*)

**17 Dec**            **Final Exam: 09:45-12:00, classroom DMH149A**

---

\* AGPT: *American Government and Politics Today*

\*\*CPG: *California Politics and Government: A Practical Approach*